Children and Deployment

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Overview

- What to look out for. . .
  - Different age groups
- What you can do (both as the deployed parent and as the one staying home). . .
  - Before deployment (now!)
  - During deployment

What to look out for. . .

- Infants: No real impact
- Toddlers (1-3y):
  - Regression in walking or toilet training
  - Unexplained crying
  - More clingy and whiny

What to look out for. . .

- Pre-schoolers and Kindergarten age:
  - More clingy (to people or favorite toys)
  - Unexplained crying or tearfulness
  - Increased misbehavior (acts of frustration/anger)
  - Sleep problems (nightmares, frequent waking)
  - Worry about safety of everyone (not just deployed parent)
  - Eating problems
  - Fear of new people or situations

What to look out for. . .

- School Age:
  - Change in school performance
  - Increased physical complaints (often vague, headaches, stomachaches, other complaints when nothing seems wrong)
  - More irritable or crabby
  - Fascinated with the military and news about it
  - Worry about family and finances

What to look out for. . .

- Adolescents:
  - Same as school-age group, plus
  - Increased acting-out behaviors
    - Getting into trouble at school, at home, with the law
  - Low self-esteem and self-criticism
  - Misdirected anger
  - Loss of interest in usual hobbies or activities

What you can do. . .

- Before deployment (for the deploying parent):
  - Tell children when you'll be leaving, and an estimate of when you'll be back
  - Encourage them to ask questions
  - Discuss and accept their feelings
  - Spend as much time as you can with your children before you go, both as a group, and individually

What you can do. . .

- Before deployment (for the deploying parent):
  - Consider having them help you pack
  - Consider a “field trip” to see what you do at work, so they have a better understanding of what you’ll be up to while away from them (clear with command!!!)
  - Give each child a small comfort item personally from you
  - Leave notes, cards, letters, pictures, small items, etc that can be given out to your child by the person who they stay with while you’re gone

What you can do. . .

- Before deployment (for the parent staying home with the children):
  - Make sure each child has a picture of the deploying parent with that child
  - Put together a “care package” or letter/card that the deploying parent can open after they leave
  - Establish the rules/limits of the household prior to the deploying parent’s departure—Be consistent!

What you can do. . .

- Before deployment (for the parent staying home with the children):
  - Record video or audio tapes of the deploying parent reading stories (bedtime for example) to each child
  - Plan fun activities to do before and after the deploying parent leaves

What you can do. . .

- During the deployment (for the deployed parent):
  - Remember birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions with letters, cards, small gifts
  - Write often!
    - Pictures may mean as much as words, especially for the younger child
    - Consider tape recorded messages back (this may be impractical)
    - Write to each child specifically
    - Play games by correspondence (if you're really patient)

What you can do. . .

- During the deployment (for the parent at home):
  - Consistency with the rules!
  - Don’t say “Just wait until your mother/father gets back. . .” in a threatening sort of way
  - Keep track of time with a diary, a calendar, a paper chain, jelly beans in a jar, etc.

What you can do. . .

- During the deployment (for the parent at home):
  - Write (help the kids do it, and do so yourself)
  - Send tape “letters” (if this is practical)
  - Tape everyday situations, such as a mealtime
  - Talk to the children about their ongoing feelings
  - Give them an “important” job such as tracking the deployed parent’s favorite sports team

What you can do. . .

- During the deployment (for the parent at home):
  - Talk about the deployed parent daily
  - Let the child know it’s okay to be sad/upset/etc, but that it’s important to move on.
  - Reassure them the deployed parent will be home just as soon as they can be
  - Look at world maps, compare where you are to where the deployed parent is

What you can do. . .

- During the deployment (for the parent at home):
  - Reassure children they are loved (by you at home and the parent far away)
  - Be honest with your children
    - Keep them up to date at an age-appropriate level
    - Be careful with media exposure, especially in the event of a major crisis

What you can do. . .

- During the deployment (for the parent at home):
  - Provide other adult relationships to influence your children
    - Grandparents, other family members
    - Neighbors, friends, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, etc
  - Take care of YOURSELF
    - Arctic Health Link 353-4148